

# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HADDONFIELD

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343 Kings Highway East

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## **Leon Stark, Philadelphia Antique Dealer, to Give Talk on the "Psychology and Economics of Collecting," May 23rd**

Anyone in Delaware Valley who has seriously collected antiques knows Leon Stark. His shop on 17th Street near Locust in Philadelphia displays some of the choicest furniture and accessories of the Queen Anne, Chippendale and Federal periods. Despite the extreme rarity of American antiques for sale, they can still be found in this shop where top collectors have gone for many years to build notable collections.

### **NEXT MEETING**

DATE: Tuesday, May 23

TIME: 8:00 P. M.

PLACE: Lake Street Friends  
Meeting House

At our next meeting, Mr. Stark will give us some eye-opening facts about the comparative costs of antiques today and in the past. He will tell us about the availability of antiques, the increasing difficulty in replacing them and their value as "investments."

Mr. Stark observes that any national or international bad news is usually reflected in a drop in the stock market but that good antiques stand up best in a depression. "You can always find somebody with a ready dollar to invest in antiques," he says.

Of special interest and value in Mr. Stark's talk will be his advice on the wisest investments in antiques today. He mentions that the floodgates have been opened on considering antiques anything made before the machine age. His own cut off date is 1825, the Federal period.

Mr. Stark is a native Philadelphian, the fifth generation in the antique business. He recalls, "I knew I was going to be an antique dealer when I was a small child and visited my great aunt's shop at 10th and South Streets in Philadelphia. She was a fourth generation antique dealer and a connoisseur of American antiques in the day when they were not appreciated as they are today."

For serious collectors, "young" collectors, dilettantes or merely admirers of antiques, the revelations of this noted antiquarian will be rewarding to the ear and the purse. Don't miss it and bring your antique-collecting friends.

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DON'T FORGET THE FLEA MARKET ON THE GROUNDS OF GREENFIELD HALL, SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you have any white elephants to contribute for sale, please get in touch with Chairman Mrs. Paul Sims, HA 9-3544.

## McNeil House Demolished Despite Society Efforts; Leadership Spurs Action for Future Preservation

The beautiful, elegant old McNeil House at 134 Kings Highway West has been destroyed by the wrecker's ball.

In its place will be a large, institutional brick building of 65 rooms whose facade facing Kings Highway will be a solid wall relieved by a few windows and jutting out 20 feet beyond the building line of adjoining residences.

The efforts of the Historical Society and other public spirited citizens to save the McNeil House failed only because there is no law in Haddonfield to prohibit the demolition of any property by its owner.

The action taken by the Trustees to obtain a temporary restraint to halt destruction, pending the determination of the court as to the legality of erecting the new building in an area with residential zoning restrictions, was only pursued after all other means of halting the demolition was undertaken.

Since there were many errors in the newspaper accounts and comments on the action by the Society and the twelve other plaintiffs in the case, the Officers of the Society feel that the members should know the facts that led to the request for a temporary restraining order by the court.

In February, our president, Mr. Louis Goettelmann, was advised by John Marter, Borough Administrator, in a casual telephone conversation that the McNeil House was to be demolished and that it was being offered to anyone who would move it. No mention was made of the new building that was to replace it. Contrary to newspaper accounts, no formal letter was sent to the Historical Society regarding this demolition.

On March 15, our Corresponding Secretary, Elinor Jennings, wrote a letter to the Commissioners on behalf of the Society expressing opposition to the demolition. The letter said in part, "... this handsome residence should be preserved and much thought plus wide publicity given if the moving of it is demanded by its present owners.

"Our King's Highway has long been an area of beauty for its splendid types of architecture. Many properties have recently been poorly remodeled or totally destroyed. If this trend is permitted to increase, the treasured homes shall soon no longer exist. The pride, so revered by all the true devoted townspeople shall diminish through lack of persistence of its authoritative leaders. Many cities and communities have faced similar situations due to growth and progress but have overcome tragic losses through competent groups that find means of preservation.

"The Society urges that our Administrator and Commissioners bring this situation pertaining to the McNeil home and its application toward similar future situations before the public in the near future, since the change in this property is scheduled for the next month."

The Society did not receive a reply to this letter nor was any action whatsoever taken by the Administrator or Commissioners Farrell and Hinski. Mayor Fretz was out of town at the time and so upon his return on April 4, Lou Goettelmann and a member of the Society called upon him and requested his assistance in saving the McNeil house.

Mayor Fretz suggested members of the Society attend the Commissioners' regular meeting that evening and bring the matter to their attention.

At the Commissioners' meeting, on April 4, Mr. Goettelmann led a group of about 15 members of the Society in bringing the matter to the attention of the borough officials. But we found that these officials had discussed the matter and the Society's letter in a "caucus" that afternoon and before the members could present their objections, they announced plans to issue the demolition permit.

Having been turned down by the Commissioners, Mr. Goettelmann and our Vice-President John Wood, Jr. with several Trustees and members of the Society called upon Sister Maria James, headmistress of St. Mary's Academy, to plead to save the McNeil House. Constructive suggestions were made by Mr. Goettelmann and Mrs. Haydock for retaining the house and building an extension in the rear for the nuns' expanded needs. Eloquent appeals were made by all on behalf of the historical and architectural significance of the property and how deeply Haddonfield feels about its "treasured houses." As a last resort, a member urged delay so that someone could be found to move the house.

When this appeal failed and Sister James announced her intention to proceed with demolition and new construction "because it is the building season and we can't delay," Mr. Goettelmann called a special Trustees meeting to discuss other

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## **In Memoriam Herbert R. Leicht**

A great and greatly gifted spirit has departed from this world and this town. Herbert R. Leicht, architect, artist, historian and past president of the Haddonfield Historical Society, died April 10, but his masterworks will always be with us.

Herb Leicht left an indelible stamp of beauty, quality and excellence on this entire community and it is through his untiring efforts and inspiration that we now have as headquarters, Greenfield Hall, one of the most historic and beautiful homes in all of Camden County.

Herb, as everyone who knew him affectionately called him, served as president of this Society seven years, from 1953 to 1960. Never fond of administrative duties and details, he nevertheless guided the Society to the highest standards of scholarship and dedication to the perpetuation of all that was worth preserving in Haddonfield.

Herb was a distinguished member of the West Jersey and Philadelphia chapters of the American Institute of Architects, and the Society of Architectural Historians, an international organization. He served for many years on the art jury of official Haddonfield and in that capacity influenced the architecture and entire appearance of this community which has been held up as a model by other towns throughout the state and country. Before his death he was a member of the Zoning Board of Adjustments where he served for seven years.

Early in his career he joined the noted architectural firm of Day and Klauder (now Trautwein and Howard) and continued there until his death. He was considered one of the country's finest authorities and architects in the Gothic tradition as well as the Colonial tradition. He designed a few Gothic buildings for Princeton University and received national recognition for his designs at the University of Colorado.

A man of many talents, Herb Leicht was president of the Musical Art Society of Camden, and contributed his superb voice and musicology to the choral society. He was an active member of the Baptist Church in Camden and his philanthropy there is well known.

Many examples of Herb Leicht's architectural brilliance enhance the Haddonfield landscape. His own home at 22 Roberts Ave. represents his genius. The house was moved from Kings Highway by Jim Noble, formerly manager of the Bell Telephone Co. here, bought by Herb, restored and improved with such taste that this modest small house became one of the architectural gems of the community. In it Herb had assembled one of the finest collections of American antiques in the Delaware Valley.

Among his many notable remodeling works was the home of the Raymond Armstrongs on Mountwell Ave. which received national recognition by BETTER HOMES & GARDENS magazine. He also guided the beautiful restoration of the Pearsons' home, the old Gill house, on Lane of Acres, the Atkinsons' home on Potter Street, the Archers' home on the Hunt Tract and other architecturally historic homes locally and elsewhere. The many new homes he designed were equally as outstanding for authenticity, proportion and detail whether a New England salt box, a Georgian classic, or a contemporary house. All were brilliantly compatible with the architectural traditions of Haddonfield.

We shall miss Herb Leicht not only for his many talents but also because he was a delightful, genuine friend. He gave of his architectural and antiquarian counsel freely, he inspired all those who knew him to a greater appreciation of the beauty and quality in Haddonfield which he did so much to preserve and enrich.

### **SOCIETY PLANS SALEM BUS TOUR FOR JULY 8 PICNIC MEETING**

Each year in July, the Society holds an outdoor picnic-box-lunch meeting in the garden of Greenfield Hall.

This year, instead of the customary program, members will be taken by bus to Salem to visit the Historical Society there and several of the most interesting old houses. They will return for a box lunch at Greenfield Hall. The tour is scheduled for July 8 at 4:30 p. m. Additional details will be sent by mail to members. Mark your calendars now!

# Historical Society of Haddonfield

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## THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF HADDONFIELD

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matters which needed attention and to ask what further action the Trustees might take to halt the demolition which was imminent any hour.

The Trustees agreed that the only remaining step was legal action with the hope that if the new building was found illegal in a residential area, the nuns would not tear down the old house.

On April 28, the restraining order was denied by Superior Court Judge W. Orvyl Schalick on the grounds that neither the demolition permit nor building permit had yet been granted by the Commissioners. Our counsel, James G. Aiken, contended that the Society was seeking court action to prevent the Academy from destroying the structure prior to a further hearing. He said the building could be knocked down within hours after receipt of a permit which may be issued at any time and before the Society could file a suit for restraint.

The judge, however, did not dismiss the case and ordered a further hearing on the issue when the permits are granted.

This was a partial victory for the Society but, of course, it did not and could not save the McNeil House.

The plaintiffs are proceeding to restrain the erection of the new convent on the grounds that it does not conform to the zoning code governing that residential area.

In the event that all legal means to preserve the traditional residential character of West Kings Highway fails (and already there are plans underfoot by owners of other fine old homes in that area to demolish their properties for more profitable uses now that a precedent has been set by St. Mary's Academy) the Society feels that it has won, at least, the attention and concern of the entire community to preserve traditional and historical Haddonfield.

The Society leadership in this matter has already born fruit. A new group has been formed tentatively named, "The Society for the Preservation of Residential and Historical Haddonfield." At an initial meeting a few weeks ago, at which Society members Lou and Martha Goettelmann, Mrs. Jesse Haydock, Dr. and Mrs. William Snape, Joan and Jim Aiken, Marge Richardson, Caroline Moody and others were present, plans for incorporating the Society and inviting membership were executed. For the purpose of getting started, Trustees were chosen: our president, Louis Goettelmann, Dr. William J. Snape and Mr. David Miller.

Our Historical Society will have a large part to play in the new group. The knowledgeability and dedication of our members regarding the historic and traditional homes, buildings and sites in Haddonfield will be invaluable in effecting legislation to save this irreplaceable portion of Haddonfield -- which will be one of the first goals of the new Society.

An open meeting for all those interested in joining will be held at Greenfield Hall on Wednesday, May 17, 8 p.m. There is no obligation to join but it is hoped that a great number of our members will come out and hear the constructive program outlined for the new Society and its vital importance in preserving the beauty and distinction of the last remaining colonial town in Camden County -- and also in preserving the property values of every one of us.

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Temporary printer's problems caused format change this issue.